

Words Interlacing Works:

An Investigation of Collaborative Interdisciplinary Endeavors

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Introduction

Over the course of my undergraduate experience at The Ohio State University, I have become increasingly interested in investigating the depth of human expression and relation found within art forms. My dual studies in English and Dance as well as my extracurricular activities have exposed me to many contrasting viewpoints and approaches to artistic endeavors. It is my belief that the wide range of ways we express ourselves in various cultures and disciplines are more interrelated than may be apparent at first glance. However, it has been my experience that often the segregating terminologies (i.e. professional jargon) that align with specific forms prevent open dialogue in interdisciplinary endeavors.

I have developed and refined a broad set of shared terminology applicable when looking at the integral compositional elements embedded in every art form with the goal of creating a base language that can be understood across disciplines.

This year, I brought together artists from various disciples to create a series of collaborative projects. My goal was to determine the practicality of my terminology in such settings.

Through providing structure to the beginning discussions about the work we would make together, contributing artists were able to know their role, propose ideas, and ask questions without trepidation. I hope that this research will help to alleviate the strained miscommunication that can often inhibit interdisciplinary artistic connection. This research will fuel my own future endeavors and hopefully help to establish a new approach to collaborative process.

Research Method

- Study existing terminologies of various art disciplines and read texts focused on compositional jargon
- Converse with other artists and art enthusiasts
- Travel abroad to gain a wider perspective on the arts within different cultural contexts
- Engage in the creation of interdisciplinary works to create opportunities to work through the qualms of differing vocabularies and language barriers that emerge
- Produce a test run of the terminology in collaborative works (*Polyphony: A Collection of Collaborative Projects*)
- Survey collaborators on their understanding of the four categories

Purpose

“The reason for being. The reason to create the work. The justification or research question/ answer”

“A purpose is an idea for which we set a goal. In this case, the purpose may be expressed as the goal of creating an inter-collaborative work of many forms of performance and visual art, which was the show, *Polyphony*.”



Method

“Method could be applied to any pre-planned action. In the arts, Method has different synonyms; practice, sketch, mock-up, rehearse, etc. this is inherently a large part of a performance, and often a celebrated part of a visual art piece.”

“Loose in content, but rigorous in schedule. To leave the collaborators to their own devices but ensure a timely and organized timeline of making.”



Theme

“The theme of the show seemed to become the interconnectedness of human beings, or how multifaceted human interactions are (mirroring the multifaceted content of the show). There were so many different emotional relationships present in the show, and that seemed to be a subtle statement about the immense range of human emotions, and how physical contact and visual imagery play into the emotional spectrum, and add to the interconnectedness of our intricate, ever-changing relationships.”



Structure

“The ways in which the theme is presented.”

“The program went back and forth between music collaborations and combining acting with dance. The final piece incorporated the most dancers and also featured structures designed by a local artist. So I suppose the overall structure was to feature different artists and then the final piece to be a more all encompassing collaborative performance.”



Results/Findings

- The four main categories were well understood to those involved, despite the range of disciplines and techniques.
- The words themselves were helpful in producing *Polyphony*, but there was a greater value in the open dialogue they necessitated.
- Because each project began with an initial conversation of the four categories, the collaborators established:
 - a shared **purpose**
 - a **method** for how to work cohesively with various creative processes
 - potential **themes** involved
 - an idea of the **structure** the work would take
- This conversation formed a work dynamic between the contributors and clarified the roles and expectations of every person involved.
- The initial conversation laid a foundation for the positive decorum that carried throughout the process.
- I believe that the common ground shaped by these categories would aid in any collaborative artistic work.

Moving Forward

- Continue to develop the practice of using the terminology
- Consider publishing my work in order to aid other artists in meaningful communication and thoughtful collaboration
 - Boysenberry Image Factory's performance video and “Behind the Scenes” interviews of the experience of *Polyphony* will serve as documentation of the interdisciplinary work involved in creating the show.
- Use as a reference tool for other artists and audiences

References

Complete bibliography of text, interview, video, and internet sources available upon request. Poster photographs by Boysenberry Image Factory and Lisa Switlick. Video documentation by Boysenberry Image Factory. Quotes taken from responses to an anonymous survey of the collaborators of *Polyphony* regarding the four categories.